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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: NORTH KOREA, MA YING-JEOU'S TRIP TO JAPAN

11. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies gave significant coverage July 12 to Taipei prosecutors' secret questioning of First Lady Wu Shu-chen Sunday concerning her alleged role in the fight over the ownership of the Sogo Department Store; and the release on bail of President Chen Shui-bian's son-in-law, Chao Chien-ming, for involvement in an insider trading case. All papers front-paged Wu's admission that she received Sogo Department Store gift certificates from Huang Fang-yen, the First Family's personal physician, as a gift to her grandson, but stressed that she was unaware that these gift certificates came from people involved in the competition for ownership of the department store. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran an analysis on page two with the headline "Building a Firewall, Bian Has More Battles to Fight in Order to Secure His Presidency." The pro-unification "United Daily News" carried the results of its latest survey, which showed that 52 percent of those polled said they do not accept the prosecutors' decision to release President Chen's son-in-law on bail. The same poll also found that 67 percent of respondents believe that the prosecutors had hastily closed the case of Chao Chien-ming, and 65 percent believe prosecutors have tried deliberately to protect the First Family.

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a commentary in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said the mysterious mask covering North Korean Leader Kim Jong-il will be taken off eventually. A commentary in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" discussed China's influence on North Korea, adding that it is very important for Beijing to bring Pyongyang back to the negotiating table. A separate "Apple Daily" commentary discussed KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou's trip to Japan, calling it a journey of re-acquaintance for Ma. End summary.

13. North Korea

A) "Behind the Mysterious Mask of Kim Jong-il"
"Apple Daily" President James Tu noted in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" circulation: 500,000 (7/12):

"... The North Korean regime is a living fossil that has survived Communist authoritarianism, and Kim Jong-il's mysticism is an inseparable part of this regime. Regardless of Kim's personal style, the top goal of Kim's regime is nothing but to secure his survival. It's just that in an era of globalization, it will be very difficult for the 'independent' line adopted by Kim's regime to find itself a successor. Some people predict that North Korea will eventually collapse, while some believe that Kim will, despite all difficulties, adopt a route of Chinese reform and opening. No matter which way Pyongyang will take, Kim's mysterious and puzzling mask will be taken off eventually."

B) "China's Influence Limited in North Korea"

Columnist Frank Ching commented in the conservative,

pro-unification, English-language "China Post" circulation: 30,000 (7/12):

"... Actually, the North Korean missile tests show just how limited Chinese influence is. Premier Wen Jiabao had publicly warned against proceeding with the tests, but he was snubbed by North Korea. The failure of North Korea's Taepodong-2 intercontinental ballistic missile to remain in the air for more than 42 seconds shows that the country is far from being a military threat to the United States. Kim Jong-il threats of 'all-out war' are nothing but bluster and Washington should not feel a need to react to them. ...

"Indeed, Chinese and American interests, just like Chinese and North Korean interests, are not identical. While some in Washington would like to see North Korea collapse and be absorbed by South Korea, Beijing wants to prop up the Kim Jong-il regime, which acts as a buffer between it and American troops based in South Korea. ... What both China and the United States have to keep in mind is their common objective: a non-nuclear Korean peninsula. Realization of this objective requires North Korea's presence at the negotiation table. ...

"The Chinese are now floating the idea of an 'informal' session of the six-party talks in an attempt to get North Korea to participate without seemingly violating its own precondition. The United States has agreed to meet North Korea bilaterally in the context of such a session. One key goal of the Hui mission to Pyongyang must be to coax North Korea to take part in such a session. If this mission is successful, it would suggest that China can continue to juggle its dual role both as North Korea's ally and as America's partner in the attempt to defuse the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula. It would also suggest that the diplomatic route still offers hope of a solution."

14. Ma Ying-jeou's Trip to Japan

"Ma Ying-jeou's New Perception of Japan"

Columnist Antonio Chiang noted in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 500,000] (7/12):

"... Taiwan is an island, which relies heavily on mainland China in terms of economic relations. But in the meantime, China is also the biggest threat to Taiwan's existence. Judged from the political perspective, Taiwan must try its best to improve cross-Straits relations, but when it comes to the island's national security, it has to hold on tight to the U.S.-Japan alliance. Taiwan can be either pro-China, pro-U.S., or pro-Japan; it can neither stay neutral nor play the role of a balancer. This is international reality, and Taiwan must make a choice.

"Ma Ying-jeou tends to be anti-Japan, but luckily, he is not an ideologically-oriented person. Ma's visit to Japan this time is a trip of re-acquaintance. He does not have to know everything about Japan, nor does he have to be pro-Japan. He can make a right choice as long as he has a profound understanding of Taiwan's interests and its national security. ..."

YOUNG